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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of the two 1998 issues of a magazine for parents, teachers, and others involved in cooperative nursery schools. The magazine is designed to provide a forum for views on dealing with young children, express a variety of ideas, promote the cooperative philosophy, and to enhance the relationships of those involved in cooperative nursery schools. The Spring 1998 issue contains the following articles: (1) "Adventures in Learning: An Interview with Nancy Weber" (Lisa Mangigian); (2) "If I Were To Start My Family Over Again" (John Drescher); (3) "When You Are Concerned about a Child's Development: Ideas for Parents and Children" (Mary Donegan); (4) "Remember Your Mother...Goose" (Lee Ann Teagan); and (5) "One Step Ahead: A Review of Readable Resources for Parents and Teachers" (Gretchen Geverdt). The Fall 1998 issue contains the following articles: (1) "Welcome to Co-op: Sharing Learning with the Whole Family" (Marjorie Kunz); (2) "Me at Home, Me at School: Using Journals with Preschoolers" (Sharon Elliott, John Nosowad, Phyllis Samuels); (3) "Becoming a Writer Naturally: Supporting Children's Writing Efforts" (Laurie Van Wormer); (4) "Dance Classes for Young Children...Much More Than a Pink Tutu" (Susan Filipiak); (5) "Lead Poisoning: The Silent Threat" (Debra Harvey); and (6) "Building Firm Foundations: Financing Your Child's Future" (Mary Crombez). (KB)

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Offspring is written for parents, teachers and others:

- To provide a forum for views on dealing with young children;
- To express a variety of ideas;
- To promote the co-op philosophy;
- To enhance our relationships with children and each other.

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Adventures in Learning: An Interview with Nancy Weber

Nancy Weber is a former classroom teacher with twenty years of experience and adventures in education and parenting. She has a Master's degree in early childhood education and is working on a second Master's degree in clinical counseling. Nancy resides in Bay City, MI with her two teenagers and has been presenting motivational keynote speeches and workshops for educators, parents, and students since 1987. MCCN is excited to have Nancy give the keynote presentation at this year's MCCN Conference to be held April 17 and 18 at the Kellogg Center on the campus of Michigan State University.

Lisa Mangigian has been an editor for Offspring *since 1993. When she's not studying for her Master's degree in guidance and counseling from Eastern Michigan University she can be found at home in Dexter, MI with her husband and three children.*

By Lisa Mangigian

For young children, the parents and teachers ARE the learning experiences.

Offspring: Tell us about your early adventures in learning.

Weber: Well, I'll never forget that Mrs. Logan never told anyone when I pooped my pants in nursery school! I owe her a great debt for that. Miss Marian was beautiful and motherly. She ran a tight ship but was very kind. I thought of her as a fairy princess. Her kindergarten was stimulating and very playful. The only thing missing was the literacy infusion that we look for today. I remember watching my first grade teacher, Mrs. Curtis, read a note from my mom. Her blue eyes were endlessly fascinating to me; mine are brown. I watched them move back and forth as they swept the page and remember thinking, "So that's how grown-ups read so fast!" From then on I practiced like crazy. My second grade teacher, Mrs. House, lived near me. I saw her walking her dog and working in her yard in shorts and a t-shirt! This humanized her. It reduced the mysticism of all teachers a little for me. All of these early teachers were my learning experiences. It was the emotional connection to them that remains in my memory and gives meaning to learning and to school. For young children, the parents and teachers ARE the learning experiences. And it was teachers that later influenced me to pursue a career in education.

Offspring: What else has influenced your career?

Weber: My learning has influenced my teaching. I had a lot of trouble in school after the elementary years, because my learning style dictates that I learn by doing and in a context that makes sense to me. I do not memorize well and do not learn facts well in isolation. If I am not personally interested in something, it is very hard for me to understand. I did not realize any of this until I was nearly thirty, so I interpreted my struggles as if I were dumb. I know that when children are taught in developmentally appropriate ways and in line with their own learning styles, children do not have to feel inferior. They can love learning.

Offspring: What did you learn/are you learning from your own experience of raising children?

Weber: I have learned a lot from raising my own kids. I wish I could start over! I always tell parent groups that despite my educational background and experiences, I am no expert on raising kids. I am a parent who has had many experiences that I can share. I try to offer parents the benefit of my hindsight.

Offspring: What's your philosophy of parenting?

Weber: My particular philosophy is that parents need to be firmer and nicer. Parental guilt from divorce and working are causing parents to be overindulgent and crabby. We need to switch that around and be really kind to our children while retaining healthy, firm authority.

Offspring: Tell us about some of your parenting adventures.

Weber: I enjoyed traveling across Michigan and even the country when my daughter was showing horses. When my son was in kindergarten he wrote a movie script, designed and made costumes and filmed a video starring his mother. I still enjoy watching that. The whole neighborhood was involved. He even hired my secretary to scribe for him. One unusual adventure is that I held my son in my arms during his circumcision. I guess my favorite memory of parenting is nursing my babies.

Offspring: Nancy, you have so much to say to parents of young children, what other advice would you like to share with our readers?

Weber: Be home with your children. Take a hard look at your finances, because it is likely that with a life-style change a parent can be the main caregiver. Be firm and loving. Dare to be in authority. Don't be afraid to say no. Be vigilant, because they need protection from cultural influences. Turn off the television. Get off the telephone!

...parents need to be firmer and nicer.

Early learning experiences for children are dependent on the people with whom they interact.

Offspring: What do you remember most about your experiences as a teacher of preschoolers?

Weber: All of my key experiences as a classroom teacher have to do with having a loose plan and allowing the children to follow their own interests and desires while I interacted and followed, not led.

Offspring: Can you comment on the role of cooperative nursery schools and parent involvement?

Weber: Co-ops put their money where their mouths are because they let parents know that they are integral parts of the learning process. Schools pay lip service to the notion that they want parents, but don't always back it up with action. Parents need to spend more time with their children, and cooperative nursery schools help make this possible. Early learning experiences for children are dependent on the people with whom they interact. Parents are experts on their children. Teachers are experts on education. Strategies can be modeled and knowledge shared in a cooperative environment of trust and friendship. Nothing could be better!

Let the Children...

Let the children wear summer in their hair,
petals, rainwater, saltwater, lake water, hose spray,
stray weeds, insects, smoke of roasting marshmallows;
schedule them if you must
in the fall, winter, spring
but let them dig their toes in sand, mud, grass,
sleep late, create libraries under trees,
on porches when shade beckons,
stick their hands in cookie dough, make messes,
stretch out under the stars,
pull the TV plug to make their own dramas,
willy nilly silliness, plant seeds,
bite into tomatoes whole, juice running down,
discover clouds, play ball,
change the rules by their own votes,
take them to the zoo, the park,
protect them from harm,
encircle them, their laughter
with your love, so when they are grown
they might say with the poet,
"Turn backward, O time in thy flight
and make me a child again just for tonight."
Let them sing!

Elizabeth Burgard in The Baltimore Sun, *8/22/95*
Reprinted with permission

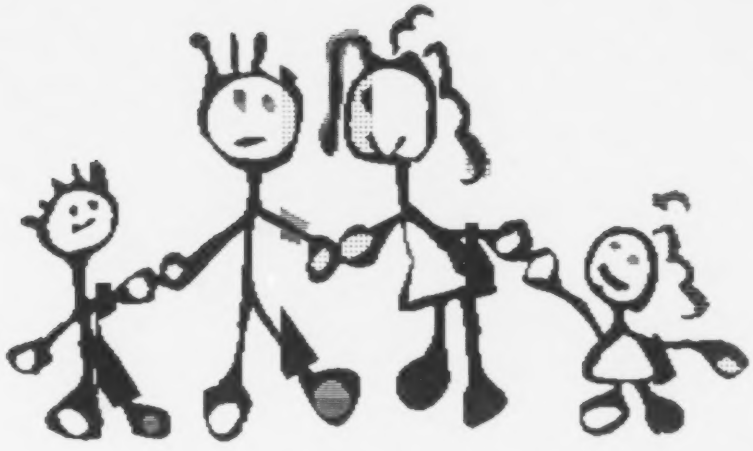
Offspring Classics

If I Were to Start my Family Over Again

Occasionally we like to print an article of timeless value. While the world changes, we realize that certain aspects of childhood never change. As much as we want to keep you abreast of new developments in early childhood, we do not want to lose touch with our history. *If I Could Raise my Family Again* was written for a different audience than today; however its message remains relevant.

John Drescher originally offered this article as a supplement to a presentation he gave for the parents involved in the Sparkey Program (Wayne-Westland Community Schools). It was brought to our attention by one of our editorial board members.

By John Drescher



"What have you learned from your own experience and through counseling parents? What should I have done differently? I have young children. If your children were small again what would you do?"

These words burst from the burning heart of a father sitting across from me. He was suffering the empty, deathlike feeling a father senses when his son has strayed. He felt he had failed as a father.

I would love the mother of my children more. That is, I would be freer to let my children see that I love her.

And this father's words stay with me. Although they came to me in a direct and blunt way that day, they are not the words of a lone father. In them are the questions which are uppermost in the minds of many parents, if they take parenthood seriously.

What has experience in counseling taught me? Where would I put the emphasis if my children were small again? I've pondered these questions and some things have surfaced.

Love of Child's Mother. If I were starting my family again, I would love the mother of my children more. That is, I would be freer to let my children see that I love her. It is so easy for parents to assume love, to take each other for granted, and so to let a dullness creep in which can dampen the deepest love.

After I spoke on relationships to a large group of fathers and mothers, a father approached me and said, "If I understand you this evening you said the greatest thing I can do for my child is to love his mother? Is that correct?"

"That is correct," I answered.

When a child's parents love each other, there is a security, stability, and sacredness about

life, which is gained in no other way.

To let my child know I love his mother, I would seek to be faithful in doing little loving things for her. True love is visible. I would show special kindness such as opening the car door, placing her chair at the table, giving her little gifts on special occasions, and writing her love letters when I'm gone from home. I would take her hand as we stroll in the park. And I would whisper loving words about her in the ears of my children. I would praise her in the presence of my children.

Does all this sound sentimental? Then I am persuaded many families need more of this kind of sentimentalism. Love is like a plant. It needs nurture. We must do the things love dictates or it will die.

Listen to My Child's Concerns. If I were starting my family over again, I would do more listening. Most fathers find it hard to listen. We are busy with the burdens of work. We are often tired when we arrive home from work. A child's talk seems like unimportant chatter. Yet we can learn so much more by listening than by talking - especially from our children.

I would listen when my child shares his little hurts and complaints, his joys and what he is excited about. I remember as clear as the day it happened the time my busy father listened to me, as a first grader, when I came home frightened about a situation at school. His calmness and concern, demonstrated in listening to me, relieved my fears. I was ready to return the following day full of courage and confidence. Had he refused to hear me out, my fears would have grown.

I would seek to keep from staring into space when my child is talking to me. I would try to understand what my child says because I now believe that the father who listens to his child, when he is small, will find that he will have a child who cares what his father says later in life. I now believe there is a vital relationship between listening to a child's concerns when he is small and the extent to which the child will share concerns with his father when he is in his teens. The father who has taken time to understand what his child says when the child is small will be able to understand his child later in life.

If my child were small again, I would stop reading the newspaper when he wants to talk with me. And I would try to refrain from words of impatience at the interruption. Such times can be the best times to show love and kindness.

One evening a boy tried to show his father a scratch on his finger. Finally, after the son repeatedly attempted to gain his father's attention, the father stopped reading and said impatiently "Well, I can't do anything about it can I?" "Yes, Daddy" his small son said, "You could have said "Oh!"

In listening, I would pay more careful attention to my

Yet we can learn so much more by listening than by talking especially from our children.

He feels he belongs when he is invited to be involved in the responsibility and work of the family.

child's questions. It is estimated the average child asks 500,000 questions by the age of fifteen. What a privilege for every parent - a half million opportunities to share something about the meaning of life.

These early years are the years for teaching. And by the time the child reaches fifteen, parents have done most of their teaching. By fifteen, the child knows what the parents believe. From now on, parents' primary opportunity is to be available when the child comes for help.

Giving a Feeling of Belonging. If I were starting my family again, I would seek to use as many opportunities as possible to give my child a feeling of belonging. A sense of belonging is essential for a child's security and feeling of worth.

How are feelings of belonging generated? By doing things together, by sharing common concerns and trusting each other with responsibilities. Celebrations of birthdays, when the person - rather than the gifts - is central, creates a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging is built into the child when prayers are prayed on his behalf, when his opinions are valued, and when he is included in both the serious and fun experiences of the family.

He feels he belongs when he is invited to be involved in the responsibility and work of the family. No part of child guidance is more important than assuring the child by action and word that he is important for the family and he has a place in the affections of the family.

Praise My Child. If I were starting my family over again, I would seek to be freer to express words of appreciation and praise. Children are reprimanded for making mistakes, but many children seldom hear words of commendation and encouragement when they do a job well or exhibit good behavior.

Will Sessions, discussing the topic, "If I had a teenager," says, "I would bestow praise. If the youngster blew a horn, I would try to find at least one note that sounded good to my ear, and I would say a sincere good word about it. If the school theme were to my liking, I would say so, hoping that it would get a good grade when it was turned in. If his choice of shirt or tie, of socks or shoes, or any other thing met my liking, I would be vocal."

Probably no other thing encourages a child to love life, to seek accomplishment, and to gain confidence, more than proper, sincere praise - not flattery but honest compliments when he does well.

Take More Time With My Child. If I were starting my family again, I would plan to take time to do more things together. In every father's week

there are 168 hours. He probably spends about 40 hours at work. Allow another 15 hours for driving to and from work each week, overtime and lunch. Set aside 56 hours per week for sleep. That leaves a father 57 hours each week to spend elsewhere. How many are actually spent with his family?

A group of 300 seventh and eighth grade boys kept accurate records of how much time their father actually spent with them over a two week period. Most saw their father only at dinner. A number never saw their father for days at a time. The average time father and son were alone together for an entire week was 7½ minutes.

Arthur Gorson tells an interesting experience from his youth, "When I was around thirteen, my brother was ten. Father had promised to take us to the circus. But at lunch there was a phone call - some urgent business required his attention downtown. My brother and I braced ourselves for the disappointment. Then we heard him say, "No, I won't be down. It will have to wait."

When he come back to the table, Mother smiled, "The circus keeps coming back, you know."

"I know," said father. "But childhood doesn't."

A prominent businessman asked a friend, "Would you like to know what I am giving my son for Christmas?" He showed a piece of paper on which he had written "To my son: I give you one hour of each weekday and two hours of every Sunday to be used as you wish."

Laugh More With My Child. If I were to start my family again, I'd laugh more. That's right. I would laugh more with my child. Oscar Wilde wrote: "The best way to make children good is to make them happy." I see now that I was much too serious. While my children loved to laugh, I often must have conveyed the idea that being a parent was painful.

"The best way to make children good is to make them happy."

I remember when I laughed with my children - at the humorous plays that they put on for the family, at the funny stories shared from school, at the time I fell for their tricks and catch questions. I recall the squeals of delight when I laughed with them and shared in the stunts on the lawn or living room floor. And I remember the times they told of these experiences with joyful expressions, years later. I know when I laughed with my children our love was enlarged and the door was open for doing many other things together.

In answer to the father who sat across the table, I've jotted down these reflections. Like most important experiences in life, none of these are great ideas or difficult to remember.

These simple suggestions however, can make relationships with our children more meaningful and shape the future of a child more than great things which demand a great deal of money or exceptional ingenuity. Somehow we manage enough muscle to handle the big things of life but forget that life is largely made up of little things. So a father's faithfulness in the small things of life determines to a great degree the happiness of the home.

I know when I laughed with my children our love was enlarged and the door was open for doing many other things together.

11

When You are Concerned About a Child's Development

Ideas for Parents and Teachers

A young child entering a group setting for the first time can be an exciting milestone for both the child and his or her family. Making friends, learning and having fun are a few of the reasons parents enroll their children in early childhood programs. But for some parents, this milestone can become a surprisingly upsetting experience as they realize that their child is not developing at the same rate as other children of the same age. For parents of children who are showing delays in development, events like birthdays, family gatherings, and starting school can cause anxiety and concern. Observing their child interact with other children in a group setting can confirm or create nagging suspicions about their child's development.

Mary Donegan, Ph.D., recently joined the faculty as an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. For 10 years she worked as a teacher and education coordinator in a variety of early childhood and special education settings in Queens and Long Island, New York. At the time of publication she was looking forward to the birth of her first child.

By Mary A. Donegan, Ph.D.

Marci's Story:

My three-year-old son Kevin can be such a joy. He spends hours playing with his toy train engines. We look at his picture books together every evening at bedtime. When I enrolled him in the local early childhood cooperative nursery three mornings a week, I had high hopes that this first group experience would give Kevin a chance to make friends his own age and start talking more. I thought that going to the nursery school might help him get ready to be a big brother to the new baby due in a few months. My husband and I told him all about what he would be doing at the co-op nursery and he seemed eager and willing to go.

A couple of months have gone by, and I am so disappointed I am ready to pull him out. As nice as everyone is, this doesn't seem to be working out for my son. Kevin doesn't seem to want to play with the other children. Whenever other children start to play with him, Kevin seems to end up hitting and shrieking. I feel so embarrassed when he has tantrums, and I don't understand why he is acting this way. The teacher, Sandy, approached me recently and asked me about his behavior at home. She asked if I thought Kevin might be frustrated at not being understood by the others and not being able to tell them what he wants. She also asked about whether he has had ear infections. She made me wonder if his late talking and the tantrums could be related to one another. I know he is hard to understand but I can usually tell what he wants. Frankly, I am surprised at how clearly some of the other children his age speak. I keep hoping he will catch up by his next birthday. Could it be that there is something else wrong with my child?

Parent's Perspective

Parents undoubtedly know their own child best. They are the experts when it comes to their son or daughter. They have known their child for the longest amount of time, they know who he or she resembles in appearance, personality and behavior. Parents have the unique perspective of observing their child in a wide variety of settings and situations ever since he or she was born. It is

I feel so embarrassed when he has tantrums, and I don't understand why he is acting this way.

no wonder that parents usually have a fuller and truer picture of their child's capabilities than anyone else.

But sometimes parents like Marci feel at a loss about what is going on in their own child's development. Because no two children are alike, it is very difficult to know what to expect a young child to be doing at particular ages. Many people disagree about when to expect children to master toilet training, cup drinking, and other markers of growth. Parents who are knowledgeable about child development are wise to avoid making comparisons between their child and others. Like Marci, they may prefer to allow their child time to develop at their own pace. It is also likely that if Marci had expressed concerns to someone about Kevin's development or behavior, she'd hear stories about "late bloomers," children who didn't walk independently until they reached eighteen months or talk in sentences until after they turned three. Parents may be unsure whether their concerns are justifiable or whether they are simply overreacting. It is sometimes easier to take the approach of "wait and see."

In many cases, it is the parent who first realizes that their child is showing delays in one or more areas of development. Nevertheless, in some situations it may fall upon early childhood teachers to approach parents about their concerns regarding a particular child. Not all parents have access to resources which can help inform them about what to expect from their child and what to do if they have a concern. Some parents, particularly those isolated from extended family or another support system, may not know when a child is showing a delay in reaching developmental milestones in the areas of physical, language, social or intellectual development. Others may have other more pressing concerns or may be postponing action until they have more energy or time. Teachers know that approaching parents with concerns about a child's development is not an easy task.

Teacher's Perspective

Sandy's Story:

I have been trying to find the right time to sit down and discuss with Marci my concerns about Kevin. Not only is his speech unclear but his behavior is getting more disruptive. The tantrums are becoming more frequent. He rarely speaks and when he does, none of us in the group can understand what he is saying. I also wonder if he understands everything that we are saying to him. Could he have a hearing loss or auditory processing problems? Is his speech simply slow to develop or does he need to get help from a speech therapist? I am not sure, but I think he needs to be checked out by a speech therapist. I keep telling myself to set up a meeting with his mother but I still don't know what to say. I

have been asking her some questions, hoping that will help break the ice. I guess I just don't want to upset her, especially now with a new baby on the way. What if I'm making a big deal out of nothing?

Through their experience working with dozens of young children, teachers observe wonderful changes as young children grow and learn about themselves and others. But because early childhood teachers see a child in a somewhat different group setting and for a limited period of time, they are more likely to underestimate a child's capabilities. Indeed, teachers have many demands on their time and attention and may not have a chance to extensively observe one child. Of course, they can rely on their considerable experience working with many young children as well as their knowledge about child development to base their decisions. Early childhood teachers may be in a more objective position to decide when a child who is holding a crayon with her palm should be guided to use her fingers to hold and control the crayon. One would expect early childhood teachers to have greater objectivity than a parent due to the nature of their relationship with the child.

As Sandy expressed, sharing concerns with a parent about their child is a responsibility that causes many teachers dismay. Teachers often fear parents will become angry with them or emotionally upset. It is so much easier to discuss with parents what a child can do rather than what they can't do. For teachers, the task of approaching parents with concerns and responding to parents who ask questions about their child's development challenges them to develop some new communication skills while letting parents know "I care about you and your child." This situation also requires that a teacher become aware of resources available in their community for families who want information on evaluation and support services which are available to them.

It is so much easier to discuss with parents what a child can do rather than what they can't do.

Need for Collaboration

Both parents and teachers have valuable perspectives and sometimes different viewpoints that should be shared with one another. Parents have a more detailed picture of their own child. Teachers have the advantage of their training and experience. When they possess the common goal of doing what is in the best interest of the child, a collaborative relationship can be established which can make the most of the early education experience. By creating a partnership, they form a fuller and more accurate picture of the child's capabilities as well as developmental and behavioral concerns. Working together they can obtain the services and supports the child needs to learn and grow.

What Parents Can Do

When parents reach a point, either on their own or with the help of another, that their child needs to be evaluated they are at an important crossroads. They have decided they have to do something but they need information and support. Parents may ask themselves: Whom can I turn to? What services and resources are available to help my child? If they find something wrong with my child, is he going to be labeled for the rest of his school years?

Parents have a more detailed picture of their own child. Teachers have the advantage of their training and experience.

What to Expect

Many parents approach this step with understandable fear and anxiety. Fortunately, each county in Michigan now has a system of early intervention and special education services that will evaluate children who are demonstrating delays in development at no cost to families. These services, like speech therapy or physical therapy or occupational therapy, are provided to the child in order to take advantage of the rapid rate of development that is taking place in the first several years of a child's life. The early intervention system in our state, referred to as EARLY ON, utilizes many parents who were once or still are in the same boat. These parents are available to answer questions and offer support. Parents may also want to join a parent group to learn more about their child and gain support from other parents who are going through similar experiences.

Early intervention services are available for children from infancy up to their child's third (or fifth birthday in some counties) through EARLY ON. In many counties, when children turn three years old, the local school district assumes responsibility but EARLY ON is still a great place to start.

Once an infant, toddler or preschool age child is evaluated, a meeting is held with the parent to decide whether the child is eligible for special services. If their child is eligible, services like speech therapy or physical therapy are provided to the child in a nearby location. Many children who receive special services during early childhood continue to attend community-based nursery and preschool programs. Remember the goal of early intervention is to locate children in need of services and provide those services now so they will do better in school later. Children are re-evaluated regularly and if they no longer need the special services, the special services are stopped. Of course, as parents, you are considered partners in your child's education and would be part of this decision making process.

There are several things early childhood teachers as well as parents can do when they are concerned about a child's development. The following are some suggestions for teachers and parents to help them work together:

What Teachers Can Do:

1. Keep notes on what you observe the child to be doing in a variety of situations. These informal assessments will help you as you prepare to discuss your concerns with the parent.

2. Ask lots of open-ended questions such as: What do you see at home? What does your child like to do? How do you handle these situations? Acknowledge the parent as knowing their child best and take advantage of this knowledge to learn some strategies that the parent may have found have worked with their child.

3. Empathize with the feelings the parent is expressing: "I can see this is making you frustrated" can help a parent feel understood, supported and accepted.

4. Have information and phone numbers available on resources available to families and children in your community.

5. Offer to write up a summary of what changes you have observed and the child's strengths and areas of concern. The parent may want to keep this written report in his or her file for use as they advocate to obtain services.

6. Allow parents time to gather the strength to take those sometimes scary steps. If a parent does not act immediately on your suggestion, avoid making judgments and offer to meet again in a few months.

7. If a child is identified as having a special need, learn what you can about the condition. Offer to communicate with specialists so you can work most effectively with the child.

Remember the goal of early intervention is to locate children in need of services and provide those services now so they will do better in school later.

What Parents Can Do:

1. Call 1-800- EARLY ON for information on services in your community which are available to help you and your child and inform you about what you need to know.

2. Start an accordion file on your child and keep notes of phone contacts, evaluations, written reports and other pertinent information.

3. If your child is found eligible for special services, you may want to make some links between the nursery school he attends and the speech therapy he receives across town. You can encourage communication and consistency between the early childhood teachers and therapist by asking them to keep in monthly phone contact.

4. Seek out support from parents and professionals who understand. Many national organizations have local chapters around the country which offer support and information to parents. EARLY ON can provide you with phone numbers.

5. *Exceptional Parent* magazine offers a "1998 Resource Guide" which lists more that 1,000 resources for parents of children with disabilities. The document costs $9.95, plus $3.50 for shipping and handling. Call 1-800-535-1910 or visit *Exceptional Parent* on the web at www.eparent.com.

Editorial Note: For our out of state readers: P.L. 99-457, the federal mandate for special services for children three and under and their families, has helped to maintain or establish programs and/or services for young children with special needs. Each state in the U.S. has a program similar to Early On. Local departments of social services, mental health, education and public health all have a role. The lead agency differs from state to state but a call to any department should head you in the right direction.

Using Literature about Children with Disabilities to Promote Understanding and Acceptance

By Mary Donegan

How can we help young children accept and understand people with disabilities? One important way is through sharing children's literature. Books about children with disabilities allow young children to experience empathy with the characters. By discussing the books with children, teachers and parents encourage children to understand their feelings as well as the experiences of children with disabilities. This literature provides a starting point from which we can help children develop positive attitudes toward people with disabilities.

Research has shown that reading books about children with various special needs and participating in carefully planned discussions and activities positively influences children's attitudes (Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1996). These experiences can allow adults to clarify misconceptions, increase understandings and develop self-confidence in children with and without disabilities.

The following is a list of books for children developed by Orr and colleagues (1997) dealing with developmental disabilities which are suitable for children who are pre-kindergarten through grade 3:

Cairo, S., Cairo, J. & Cairo, T. (1985).
Our Brother has Down Syndrome. Toronto: Annick Press Ltd.

Clifton, L. (1980).
My Friend Jacob. New York: E. P. Dutton.

Fleming, V. (1993).
Be Good to Eddie Lee. New York: Philomel Books.

O' Shaunessy, E. (1992).
Somebody Called Me Retarded Today... and My Heart Felt Sad. Glendale, CA: Crestwood House, Inc.

Rabe, B. (1988).
Where's Chimpy? Niels, IL: Albert Whitman and Co.

Testa, M.P. (1994).
Thumbs Up, Rico! Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman and Co.

Here are some guidelines to consider when planning discussions about children's literature about people with disabilities:

- After the adult reads the story, the children are asked to retell the plot.
- The children are asked probing questions about their feelings, the characters and the situation which occurred.
- The children are asked what might they do in a similar real life situation. Finally, the group comes up with a conclusion based on their discussion.
- One of the best things about these books and other childrens' literature is that they can be read and discussed over and over again as children grow in their understanding of themselves and others.

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Orr, L. E., Craig, G. P., Best, J., Borland, A., Holland, D., Knodel, H., Lehman, A., Mathewson, C., Miller, M. & Pesquignot, M. (1996). Exploring developmental disabilities through literature: An annotated bibliography. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 29, 14- 17.

Trepanier-Street, M. L. & Romatowski, J. A. (1996). Young children's attitudes toward the disabled: A classroom intervention using children's literature. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 24, 45-49.

Remember Your Mother...Goose

In the early 1980's it became evident that the rhymes of Mother Goose were disappearing from early childhood literature. Children, when asked to bring their favorite Mother Goose collection to share with a preschool class, often appeared with old editions that had belonged to their parents or grocery store variety publications. Many children could not recite even the most common rhymes. A small group of educators raised concern to the cry from parents and teachers, "Why Mother Goose in the preschool curriculum?"

Lee Ann has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education and has completed graduate course work in Early Childhood Education. She is a MCCN board member and teaches at Troy Co-op and can't recall a day in the past twenty-four years when she didn't look forward to being in the classroom with the children and their parents. Lee Ann was honored in 1989 when MCCN recognized her as Outstanding Teacher.

By Lee Ann Teagan

The true origin of Mother Goose rhymes has not always been clear. There is evidence that some were political statements, some were street chants. On the other hand, some may be just as they appear, little rhymes created through oral tradition to entertain and educate children. One important function of society is the transference of information from one generation to the next. To lose this large body of classic literature would be an insult to the generations of parents and children who have loved to repeat them. Often a reference to a particular rhyme will evoke the senses of an earlier experience. Maybe it was the way a parent trilled the R's while making the purring sound of the *Three Little Kittens*, or the image of a favorite illustration accompanying *Humpty Dumpty* may be recalled. It feels good. When it is time to share these familiar rhymes with children, initially most parents do not turn to a baby-care manual; rather they call them up spontaneously, word perfect, from their own childhood.

For many, the 1980's brought about a return to family values. Artists and illustrators turned to Mother Goose for inspiration and a new wave of interest in Mother Goose appeared at the book stores: Tomie dePaola, Michael Hague, Arnold Lobel and Maurice Sendak all produced bright and entertaining insights into these traditional rhymes. Mother Goose art from the past was collected by Cooper Edens in *The Glorious Mother Goose*. It included interpretation, in color and black-and-white of illustration by Caldecott, Kate Greenaway, L. Leslie Brooke and others. Today, bookstores have a special shelf for Mother Goose books, and the characters are readily available in framed prints, fabric, ceramics and

For many children, Mother Goose can be their first introduction to literature in general, more specifically poetry.

other forms of pop culture.

For many children, Mother Goose can be their first introduction to literature in general, more specifically poetry. How many baby toes have been counted with *This Little Piggie*? How many horsy rides have been enjoyed on an adult's crossed leg to the words of *Ride a Cock Horse*, or *This is the Way the Ladies Ride*? How many little hands have clapped their way through *Pat-a-Cake*? (The musical quality to these rhymes explains why so many have developed an accompanying tune.) Children have a natural body rhythm. They beat sound patterns with feet, spoons and cups. Educators know that the repetition of rhymes combines several senses to insure that information is understood and remembered. This is why most adults can still recite *Pease Porridge Hot*.

It could be debated that the old rhymes have their drawbacks. Old fashioned language, violence, gender issues and stereotyping are present in many rhymes; however, the value of nursery rhymes outweighs their negative influences. Although the language may often seem archaic, the poetic alliteration is enchanting to the ear. The same archaic yet poetic language is also found in Shakespeare and in traditional verses of the *Bible*.

Research tells us that language development is critical between the ages of two and six years. Bill Martin once said, "By age 3 most children know the basic rules of language. It is the job of the adults in their lives to help children store language for future use." A child's memory can hold an unlimited number of words if they are introduced slowly over a period of time. Children love the sound of words and experimenting with language. For example, "tuffet" is a wonderful word to say and hear. It may not matter what the words actually mean. The alliteration found in Mother Goose rhymes is also appealing. This explains the popularity of *Wee Willie Winkle, Diddle Diddle Dumpling* and *Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater* with children as well as with adults.

One of the best reasons for reading Mother Goose to young children is that many of the rhymes tell a good story. Some school curriculums emphasize whole language and/or the creative writing process. Is there a better model for a complete plot than *Little Miss Muffet*? This is a tale of action. There is an exciting climax, and the story is over in four lines. The same model for storytelling is found in *Jack and Jill* and *Humpty Dumpty*. Hearing these stories helps children internalize the basics of plot construction.

Mother Goose reflects the interests of young children. There are animals like the cat and the fiddle or the mouse that ran up the clock. Farm animals, such as sheep, cows and pigs, are in abundance. Some are personified and others are real. *Ding Dong Bell, Old Mother Hubbard* and *I Love Little Pussy* are wonderful reminders of good care. The rhymes also tell of everyday happenings. All chil-

dren lose things like Lucy Locket, Bo Peep, and the Three Kittens. They know about pranks, and are bothered during play by children like Georgie Porgie. The seasons and weather are interpreted with *Rain Rain Go Away* and *The North Wind doth Blow*. Parents today express concern about cognitive skills for their children. How about *One Two Buckle my Shoe* or *Thirty Days hath September?* There are many opportunities for reinforcing positional words like on and off, up and down, in and out.

A parade of interesting people and occupations are found in a Mother Goose book. They come from all levels of society, kings and queens, peddlers and pipers. Children meet farmers, soldiers, as well as the butcher, baker, and candlestick maker. There is even a Man in the Moon. Old King Cole was merry and Little Boy Blue fell asleep on the job. Arnold Loebel thought these likable characters would be an excellent theme for his collection of rhymes, *Gregory Griggs*.

Children are fascinated by the wonders of nature. They love to hold ladybugs on their hands and gaze at Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star in the night sky. They plant seeds and grow a garden like Mistress Mary. When children fill and enjoy bird feeders in their yards, *I Saw a Little Birdie go Hop Hop Hop* is a fun rhyme to know. See a spider "up close and personal" and it may not seem quite so scary to little Miss and Mr. Muffet. *Humpty Dumpty* is the perfect introduction to eggs. Young children are amazed at the variety of creatures that are born in eggs: not just birds, but fish, caterpillars, frogs, turtles, snakes, and best of all...dinosaurs.

In addition, other cultures can now be explored through traditional rhymes. As we approach the next century, the importance of knowing our global neighbors is more and more evident. The *Chinese Mother Goose Rhymes* selected and edited by Robert Wyndham is a "unique collection of authentic rhymes, riddles and games that Chinese mothers have taught their children for hundreds of years." It is de-

Fortunately, Mother Goose is being preserved as more and more illustrators seek ways to make these traditional rhymes come to life.

signed to be read vertically like an Oriental scroll, with calligraphy and classical Chinese style illustrations. North country rhymes are a joyful additional to any young reader's library in *The Alaska Mother Goose* by Shelley Gill. In place of a cow that jumps over the moon, meet "Old bull moose who dreamed he could fly, sailed across a starry sky."

Fortunately, Mother Goose is being preserved as more and more illustrators seek ways to make these traditional rhymes come to life. However, parents and early childhood educators must share them with children. Little ones need to have these poems as a part of their childhood memories to save for the next generation. They want the joy of meeting new characters, understanding plot construction, hearing the musical rhythms, finding new insights into their world, and making deposits into their vocabulary account. How delightful it is to read traditional rhymes with children and help them to remember their Mother...Goose!

One Step Ahead

Readable Resources for Parents and Teachers

Editors' Note: This is the first article in a series designed to keep parents and educators *One Step Ahead* regarding early childhood education, research, and purposeful parenting.

Gretchen Geverdt has been an elementary school teacher for nine years. Last year her second grade classroom in Dexter, MI was chosen to participate in a research study for the University of Michigan.

By Gretchen Geverdt

Parents, as well as teachers, can keep *One Step Ahead* with these annotated reviews.

Endangered Minds

Jane M. Healy, Ph.D. $12.00; Touchstone/New York; 382 pp.

Dr. Healy believes that our advancing modern life-styles may be affecting the development of children's brains in subtle but critical ways. She develops her hypothesis convincingly through interviews with neuroscientists, administrators, media specialists, teachers and parents. The first section of *Endangered Minds* details the development and inner workings of young brains in clear layman's terms. Then, with this basic physiological understanding- the reader dives in to discussions of language acquisition, learning difficulties, and the media in terms of the needs of a young child's developing mind. I would highly recommend this book to parents and teachers of young children.

Positive Discipline in the Classroom

Jane Nelsen, Lynn Lott, and H. Stephen Glenn
$14.95; Prima Publishing/ Rocklin CA; 178 pp.

"We're Looking for Solutions–Not Blame."
"We're Here to Help Each Other Not Hurt Each Other."

Positive Discipline in the Classroom is a guide to using the strategy of classroom meetings (and/or family meetings) to provide loving structure to a working community. This is a 'quick read' full of perceptive tips for finding solutions together, as an act of mutual respect and cooperation. I tried *Positive Discipline's* format for meetings this year in my classroom and found that children took more responsibility for finding mutually agreeable solutions to social conflicts. This publishing company has a series called *Empowering People Books* with titles such as; *Positive Discipline for Single Parents, Positive Discipline A-Z, Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World, Positive Discipline for Pre-Schoolers*, and many more. Their phone number is 1-800- 456-7770.

Driven to Distraction - *Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder from Childhood to Adulthood*

by Edward M. Hallowell. M.D., and John J. Rate, M.D. $12.00; pub. Touchstone/ New York; 319 pp.

As a teacher, I have found this book to be an excellent resource for parents who want more information about ADD or ADHD (attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). It combines short anecdotal case studies, informal self-tests, lists of practical ideas and thorough descriptions of the physiological and medical aspects of the disorder. But even more importantly, this book deals with ADD on a personal level with warmth and optimism. It has helped several parents that I have worked with to get past the fear of ADD, and to see it as a condition that is manageable and one that can even have positive effects in a child's life.

Human Brain, Human Learning

Leslie A. Hart $17.95; Village of Oak Creek, Arizona; 206 pp.

Published in 1983 this a 'classic' book of brain-based learning theory. Leslie Hart explains his theories of learning, starting with brain development, pattern and program detection, and the influence of emotions in learning. He discusses brain-compatible teaching practices and brain incompatible practices. Although it may seem like a lot of theory, he does an admirable job of making his ideas very accessible and practical. This would be an excellent book for parents who are interested in the "hows" of their child's learning, and who are in the process of making educational decisions. (Then again, is there a parent who isn't in the process of making educational decisions?!)

Serious Players in the Primary Classroom

Selma Wasserman; Teacher's College Press/New York; 250 pp.

Dr. Wasserman's book is subtitled, *Empowering Children Through Active Play Experiences*. She provides teachers and parents with strategies for developing 'can-do' children by respectfully supporting their play choices. As a public school teacher, I found her discussions of play as a true source of creativity and its effects on a child's sense of personal power challenging and refreshing. The second half of the book contains detailed outlines for play-debrief- replay activities in science, social studies, math, and language arts which could easily be adapted for home play situations.

And for the joy of reading, don't miss this one...

A Circle of Quiet

Madeleine L'Engle $13.00; Harper/San Francisco: 245 pp.

An exceptional writer, mother, wife and neighbor reflects on her life in a small New England town. A Circle of Quiet contains plenty of fuel for sparking your own creative thoughts and is perfect for the busy parent who would curl up with a good book if they could just find the time! Enjoy!

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Offspring is written for parents, teachers and others:

- To provide a forum for views on dealing with young children;
- To express a variety of ideas;
- To promote the co-op philosophy;
- To enhance our relationships with children and each other.

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Welcome to Co-op:
Sharing Learning with the Whole Family

Parent cooperative nursery schools are exciting learning environments. Exploring, discovering, making new friends, developing new skills and sharing unique abilities in a respectful, nurturing learning environment benefits young children as well as their parents.

About the Author

Marjorie Kunz began her cooperative nursery career as a co-op parent followed by teaching for 32 years. She's currently on the Mott College faculty and has supported co-ops and MCCN as an exemplary advisor for years.

By ***Marjorie Kunz, M.A.***

Entering a cooperative nursery experience with the attitude that you wish to grow yourself, along with your child, will truly make this an enriching experience.

Cooperative nursery schools share the educational philosophies and practices of most developmentally appropriate early childhood education programs. They are designed to promote and foster the social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and communicative development of preschool aged children. Although primarily similar in design and function, cooperative nursery schools are organized somewhat differently than other preschools. The distinguishing characteristic of a cooperative nursery program is its unique involvement of parents in both the administration of the organization and participation in the nursery school as teacher assistants. Both of these functions allow parents the opportunity to learn from others as well as share their experience and talents. Entering a cooperative nursery experience with the attitude that you wish to grow yourself, along with your child, will truly make this an enriching experience.

What Can I Offer?

Many parents might say, "But I have nothing to offer. I'm not an administrator, an accomplished musician, or a trained professional in a field concerned with children. I don't have a talent to share." But each co-op family member does have something to give–a meaningful contribution to make. Every member's participation lends variety and refreshing balance to the total program. Opening a seed pod or a prickly pineapple or reading or telling a delightful story to a small group of children are just a few examples of ways parents can function effectively with the children. As parents give something of themselves, the nursery program is enriched.

The experience for parent and child, of sharing each other, is one of the most valuable the school has to offer.

What Might I Receive?

Companionship

Participating in a cooperative nursery school offers parents as well as children a number of benefits. A special sense of camaraderie can be felt in a parent cooperative nursery school. This camaraderie develops between parent and child, among the parent participants, with the teacher and between the children as they share their learning experiences in new and different ways with new and different people. The experience for parent and child, of sharing each other, is one of the most valuable the school has to offer. In time, each child learns to watch their parent work with other children and likewise each child learns to work with other adults. Wholesome growth is promoted toward greater independence.

Insight

Participation in a parent cooperative nursery setting allows parents to develop and refresh their powers of observation. Through practice and concentration parents can develop those "all-seeing-eyes" of the classroom, becoming quite aware of what is taking place in all parts of the room. Observation at the nursery school may make many things that children do seem more acceptable and less annoying. In the parent cooperative nursery school, parents will observe patterns of growth and broadening patterns of play in their own child as well as others. Co-ops allow parents the opportunity to observe child to child relationships and adult-child relationships. Often, parents are afforded the opportunity to establish some adult relationships as well.

Understanding

Parents can learn so much from watching and listening to the many ways in which children speak. In the cooperative nursery setting, parents can open their ears and minds to the conversations and activities of children, helping them understand what a wonder the world of children really is. Through participation and observation parents can learn so much about their children. While observing and learning, parents can look for desirable qualities in all children: the boisterous, the quiet, the aggressive, and the shy. Parents should feel free, indeed be encouraged, to discuss their observations with the teacher. With interpretation, the parent who is facing and accepting her job as parent will deepen her insight and grow more successful and satisfied.

Support

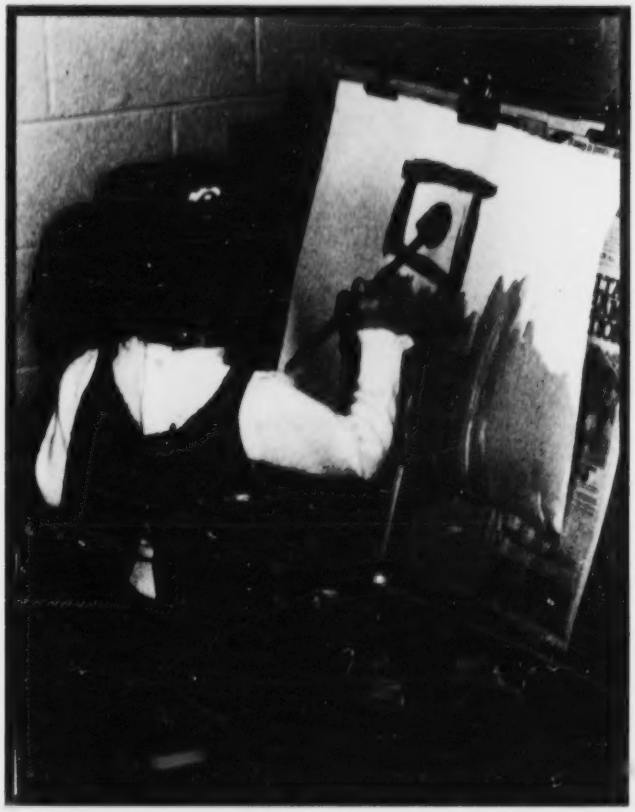
Some parents may be reluctant or hesitant about handling situations that arise at nursery school. Some parents might feel uncomfortable intervening, worrisome that they might do the wrong thing and complicate rather than solve the problem. But, in the co-op environment, the teacher's exemplary skills and early childhood expertise is available to help guide parents and lend assurance. In addition, parents can learn from one another. Parents may see others handle their child and other children in different ways. Parents may gain reassurance and confidence as they see other families coping with problems similar to their own. In this spirit of cooperation, teaching and learning become rich not only for the children but for the adults as well.

Growth

Cooperative nursery programs offer parents the opportunity to grow with their child. Together parents and children can explore new materials and new activities in a different setting. In a co-op, parents can learn what to expect from their children and find suggestions for play materials to use at home. Often, parents find alternative ways of handling situations and can learn to relax with their children. Of course, the experience is not always an easy one. Sometimes, for instance, it is hard to understand what nursery school is and how it differs from kindergarten. Perhaps the parents in the group with their varied backgrounds and temperaments clash and find themselves disgruntled or dissatisfied. The challenges of resolving such issues is in itself a good experience. It is the essence of cooperation and helps us all become better equipped adults and citizens.

Becoming active in a cooperative nursery may require rearranging your time schedule, adapting your work schedule, or postponing other fine pursuits and interests. But our children pass through these important years just once. This is the one experience for you and your child that will not wait for "a more convenient season."

Me at Home, Me at School
Using Journals with Preschoolers



The preschool is a natural arena for the enrichment of the child's communication skills in that the daily activities lend themselves to being discussed, written, documented, or recorded in many different ways. The practice of having children develop books, logs, lists, or other types of written material has been a long established language experience tool for the teacher of young children. At our laboratory school we have extended these ideas to include the use of journals with preschoolers, not only as another way of developing communication skills, but also as a way of bringing the home and school together.

About the Authors

Sharon Elliott is the Assistant Dean of the Teacher Education Division at Wayne State University. This article originally appeared in LANGUAGE ARTS (58,6) September 1981 and is reprinted here with permission. At that time Sharon Elliott was the Director and John Nowosad and Phyllis Samuels were Supervising Teachers at the Wayne State University Nursery School at the Jefferies Homes in Detroit, Michigan. Although not a co-op, this program has been known for its exemplary parent involvement.

By Sharon Elliott, Ph.D.
John Nowosad
Phyllis Samuels

It is this unique tie with the home--the linking of the parent with the educational process that makes the journal, as described herein, a rich and productive tool for the teacher.

A journal, as defined in our program, is a collection of children's statements, ideas, and thoughts, transcribed by adults, and possibly including illustrations. Journals travel back and forth between home and school.

The journal, once developed as a regular part of the school's routine, can become a powerful learning/teaching resource in several areas: 1) to strengthen communication between the home and the school, 2) to help parents understand the importance of the family and its activities in their child's learning, and 3) to assist young children in developing skills and interest in reading and writing. It is this unique tie with the home--the linking of the parent with the educational process that makes the journal, as described herein, a rich and productive tool for the teacher.

Having decided to incorporate the journal as part of a nursery school program, and in order to effectively use a journal with young children and their parents, the purpose must be communicated to every parent. This can be done through parent conferences, workshops, letters, and phone calls. On one occasion we used a Saturday morning parent meeting on the topic, "What Children Learn At Nursery School" to orient the parents to the purpose and procedures regarding the journal. Parents were told the journals would be divided into two sections, one part to be completed in school, the other to be completed at home. Parents were asked to treat the journal as they would the homework of older children.

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Elizabeth Baker

They were to find a place in the home where it would be comfortable for everyone involved to work and to use that same spot each time in order to communicate to the child that there was work to be done. The journal was sent home on a Friday and was expected to be returned the following Monday. As a general rule, the journals were sent home on a bimonthly basis.

Once the journals were returned, a wealth of opportunities for showcasing them was available to the teacher. They could be reviewed and read during the day's opening activity; they could be placed in the classroom library to be read by the teacher and children; they could be read to the children at story time in addition to or instead of a storybook, and individual word banks and dictionaries could be made.

Because the majority of preschool children do not read, the journal requires much adult participation. To make this a feasible project within the classroom, a systematized approach must be developed. In our program the actual pages were mimeographed in advance to have each separate topic as the title of the page, leaving room for the child's statement, a place to put a picture, and a place for those children who were ready to recopy the dictated statement.

Once the journals were returned, a wealth of opportunities for showcasing them was available to the teacher.

The journals opened with a "Me" page and then were followed by topics designed to orient the child to the school and to the people and activities in the school and at home. Additionally, we attempted to build a sight vocabulary, for those children who were ready, by repeating specific words. Topics for the first few months were as follows:

School Assignment
Toys at School
Friends at School
Adults at School
Books at School
Cooking at School

Home Assignment
Toys at Home
Friends at Home
Adults at Home
Books at Home
Cooking at Home

In most nursery school classrooms, there is some time devoted to the large group. In our school the journal was introduced at this time. Children then had the opportunity to think about the assignment as they worked and played (i.e., Who will I name as my friend? What books do I like at school?). They were called one or two at a time during self-selection, open play time, to work on their journals. We strived to capture each child's particular mode of self-expression, to get the statement down on paper, and to read to the child what he or she had dictated.

Elizabeth Baker

Today's parents often acquire the vast majority of their information and entertainment from television. Unfortunately, for some families reading is not a regular day-to-day event. However, most of these families want their children to be good readers and to do well in school. Sometimes families forget that family conversation, family outings, looking at books, being read to, and seeing adults read is as important as learning the alphabet. Journaling is a concrete task. It can be viewed as a book, as part of the reading process and not just the normal play of nursery school. Its concreteness serves several purposes: 1) it is a pleasant activity for the child and parent to do together, 2) it provides topics of conversation for families, 3) it broadens parents' understanding of how children learn to read, and 4) it acknowledges that reading and writing are important.

For our program, it didn't take long to identify that one of the major outcomes of journaling was the complete involvement of the children.

For our program, it didn't take long to identify that one of the major outcomes of journaling was the complete involvement of the children. They were eager to bring their journals back and forth from home and school and share their contents. An interesting aside was that there were incidents when older brothers and/or sisters would contribute to the journals by drawing a picture or writing a phrase or sentence next to the preschooler's. Some families shared their own ideas and extended the assignments.

Journals have become an important element of our nursery school program. The children have assimilated the journals into their school routine and derive enjoyment from working with them. The parents have been drawn closer to the school and the educational process that the journals represent, specifically, working with their children in a relevant and constructive fashion as a cooperative partner with the school. In addition, the teachers have been provided with another teaching tool, one that is a natural extension of the experience-based learning environments of the nursery school.

The children have assimilated the journals into their school routine and derive enjoyment from working with them.

Editor's Note:

On August 26, 1998 multiple institutions of the State of Michigan formally recognized the impact of reading and the influence of early learning on the overall development and positive outcome of our children. As a result, a collaborative effort between the government of the State of Michigan, the Michigan Department of Education, the Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children, several leading hospitals, a variety of corporate sponsors, and the public engagement campaign "I Am Your Child" announced the inception and first phase of a multi-phase roll-out of a new program entitled R.E.A.D.Y.!

Read, Educate, and Develop Youth (R.E.A.D.Y.!) is a reading readiness kit that has begun to be distributed in several hospitals throughout the state as a means to encourage families to read to their children beginning at birth. The intent of the program is to provide a R.E.A.D.Y.! kit for every family with children from birth through age four so that the children of Michigan can have the earliest start possible on learning. The kits contents are based on recent research documenting the significance of early brain develop and the importance of enhancing young children's worlds with reading and interaction with their parents. The kits contain an age appropriate book, a video, a music cassette or CD, and valuable information regarding child development and activities for families.

R.E.A.D.Y.! is currently a pilot project. But soon materials will become available for everyone. To get your child on the mailing list for this free of charge service to the families of Michigan call 1-877- 997-3239. Keep your eyes and ears open for information about how you can optimize your child's learning potential and don't forget to read, read, read with your kids!

Becoming a Writer Naturally

Supporting Children's Writing Efforts

"In classrooms throughout the country, teachers have begun responding to children's early writing just as parents respond to their children's early speech. On the first day of school, we give children paper and pens saying 'You can draw and write' . . . Our job is to respond to children's products in such a way that youngsters learn that marks on the paper have the power to convey meaning. Just as infants learn the power of their gestures through our responses to those gestures, language learners discover the power of their print and pictures through our responses."

Calkins, L.M.(1986). *The Art of Teaching Writing.* New Hampshire: Heinemann.

About the Author

Laurie Van Wormer , a longtime MCCN supporter and Programs Coordinator for the Michigan Association for the Education for Young Children, presented the following information in a workshop handout at the 47th annual MCCN conference in April of 1998.

By Laurie Van Wormer

Children need to see the daily importance of writing: signs, labels, messages, shopping lists, thank you notes, recipes, letters, newspapers. For young children, writing is synonymous with drawing, not spelling. Adults can support children's writing efforts in ways that are developmentally sound and that encourage children to be free and comfortable with the written word.

How does literacy emerge in young children? How do they learn to read and write?

- Learning to read and write is an ongoing process from infancy.
- Reading and writing develop concurrently with oral language.
- Reading and writing develop through active involvement and use.
- Reading and writing are influenced by children's cultural and social backgrounds.
- Learning to read and write is particularly enhanced by shared book experiences.

Taken from: Strickland, D. and Morrow, L. (Eds) (1998). Emerging Literacy. Young Children Learn to Read and Write, Delaware: Intro Reading Association.

Children learn to write in stages

- Scribbling–random to directional/controlled
- Drawing/Illustrating
- Sign Concept/Symbols–use of signs/symbols to represent words
- Pre-phonemic–random assortment of letters (and possibly numbers) with no sound-symbol correspondence
- Invented Spelling–use of personal logic and sound-symbol correspondence
- Standard/Conventional Spelling

What is whole language?

Whole language is a belief that children learn best by doing: Touching–Listening–Speaking–Writing–Drawing

What is invented spelling?

Stages of Invented Spelling

1. Use of initial consonant
   G GRASS
2. Initial and final consonant
   GS GRASS
3. Initial, final and interior consonants
   GRS GRASS
4. Initial, final and interior consonants, and vowel place holder. Vowel is incorrect but in correct position
   GRES GRASS
5. Full spelling of word, with final components from visual memory systems and better vowel discriminations
   GRASS GRASS

In addition, some children will write other letters as place holders because they know words have more than one letter. GRASS may be G-XYPQ or G-XYPQS.

How can parents and teachers support children's writing efforts?

- Read, read, read! Creativity and imagination are encouraged by hearing and reading good children's literature.
- Talk to and with children; written skills develop from oral language skills.
- Provide a variety of materials: paper of various sizes and colors, lined and unlined; an assortment of writing implements - pencils, pens, markers, crayons; scissors, tape, glue, staplers, stamps, stampers and stamp pads, paper punches, stickers, magazines, greeting cards.
- Answer children's questions about writing.
- Respond with interest and enthusiasm to children's writings.

Model reading and writing by:

- Recording dictated sentences and stories, and printing clearly, boldly, neatly.
- Identifying the letters and words when writing - this is much more meaningful to children than reciting the ABC's or identifying letters (flash cards).
- Labeling pictures, photographs, collections.
- Pointing to words.
- Reading labels off of boxes and cans; reading signs in the environment.
- Creating family journals, trip logs.
- Creating a message center, leaving notes for children.

Dance Classes for Young Children... Much More than a Pink Tutu

As fall approaches boys and girls put aside the freedom of summer and move toward more structured learning environments and an ever-increasing roster of extra-curricular activities. Childhood seems incomplete today without the addition of music classes, art classes, drama classes, gymnastic lessons, karate lessons, ice-skating classes, swim classes, soccer, hockey, and of course my topic, dance! This article will address the advantages and pitfalls of dance classes for young children. As you will see, dance for young children is much, much more than a pink tutu.

About the Author

Susan Filipiak, Founder and Director of Ann Arbor's Swing City Dance Studio, has been teaching dance to children and adults for over 16 years. Susan danced as a child for only one year and spent the rest of her childhood doing "regular kid things." Academically trained as an Art Historian, Susan is fascinated by the connections between art, music, drama and dance and gives great importance to their placement in the lives of children as well as adults.

By ***Susan Filipiak***

much more than a pink tutu.

At the heart of most forms of dance training is the goal to attain one ideal. The essence of mastering the major forms of dance is to copy the teacher, to copy the technique. Ballet students around the world do prescribed steps in a prescribed way. So do their cohorts in Irish Step Dance, Classical Indian Dance, Flamenco, Indonesian Dance, Jazz Dancing, Tap Dancing, etc. The student's job is to mimic, to copy, to restrict their movements in order to match an ideal form. Children younger than 6 should not be expected to narrow their horizons. A child age 3 or 4 or 5 should be exploring all forms of movement and expression. Preschool aged children should be guided into creative based classes to expand rather than limit their dance experience.

Creative dance classes explore the full range of movement and expression. The teacher gently and playfully guides children into dance through topics such as posture alignment and muscle stretching, movement skills (hopping, skipping, spinning, balancing, etc.), contrast dances (high-low, big-small, fast-slow, etc.), shape dances (circles, lines, zigzags, etc), feeling dances (happy, sad, sneaky, silly, etc.), story dances, animal dances... the topics are as rich and varied as the teacher's imagination.

When was the last time Mom or Dad did a living room jig?

All living things move to the rhythm of life, and dance is a natural extension of our life movement. We dance to the beat of our own heart, to the energy of our emotions, and to the sound of music. In my ideal world, dance is an important part of everyday family life - along with singing, art, cooking, reading, dreaming, discovering, working and playing. We dance for fun, for exercise, and for personal satisfaction. We dance to tell stories, to express emotion, to worship and praise. We dance to connect the family, the tribe, and the community. We dance to create living art.

But many families neglect dance in their lives. We have become distanced from our dancing history. Where are the public dances that united a community and welcomed the whole family? American society has seemingly lost track of its ethnically inspired music and dance celebrations. Many adults feel awkward when asked to dance. When was the last time Mom or Dad did a living room jig?

So families put their children's dance experience in the hands of dancing schools. In our community you can find career-training or hobby-building dance schools (specializing in ballet, jazz, tap), cultural-based schools (specializing in ethnic or national styles of dance), and creative-based schools (specializing in personal, explorative forms of dance). Each type of dance school has great merit for children over the age of 6 or 7. Children in a good, caring school will enjoy forward strides in their coordination, focus, physical strength and stamina, self-esteem, discipline, dedication, music appreciation, cooperation with peers, and artistic expression.

Dance is not just for girls. The gender-centric girl's world of dance often leaves boys on the outside. What parent wouldn't want their young son to progress in coordination, focus, discipline, agility, and creativity in a fun, non-competitive environment? A wise dance teacher's saying is, "If you can control your body in space and time, you can do anything." Dance is

Fun, eclectic music is used to accompany class, but the teacher may also sing or play an instrument for the dancers as well. I stress the word "playful". This is not serious study but serious fun with learning hidden inside. A good teacher motivates the students to explore the topics themselves, not just copy the actions of the teacher. In the most successful classes, the teacher spends time not dancing at all. The teacher introduces a topic, sets it in motion, and then steps back to allow the children time to explore. The best teacher keeps a good balance between creativity and chaos, guiding the children to develop their social skills as well as manners. Topics covered should cross over to the child's other interests in art, stories, sports, music, make-believe. An organized teacher presents a thorough warm-up, a skill building section, a theme for the day, and a closing activity in a half-hour class. A one hour class is too long for little ones.

In creative based classes, children wear play clothes and sneakers rather than pink leotards, tights, and ballet shoes. There is no need to uniform a child at a young age, and this approach welcomes children of all types, genders, and economic status. The structure of creative dance classes welcomes children with disabilities. A good creative dance class not only builds future ballet dancers; it builds great, well-rounded kids ready for anything.

The teacher introduces a topic, sets it in motion, and then steps back to allow the children time to explore.

Is your child ready for dance class? Parents need to remember that chronological age does not equal developmental age when placing their son or daughter in a dance class. Hopefully your child is somewhat prepared because there is dance already in your home. Your child should want to explore this new situation. Your child should have the maturity to participate in the class without a parent. Of course it's perfectly natural to have Mom or Dad join in the first couple lessons to jump-start the child, but very soon your child needs to take class alone. Your child should be comfortable with taking instruction from the teacher and should be able to work together on tasks with other children. Your child should have the focus and stamina to participate for the entire half-hour.

Some children need to quietly observe new activities before taking part. This can be done on the sidelines or–with the teacher's permission–right in class. Quiet observation can be the bridge to full participation. You may then see the activities begin to appear in the privacy and safety of your home. It is important to distinguish between quiet curiosity and fright.

Your child should be comfortable with taking instruction from the teacher and should be able to work together on tasks with other children.

Remember, it is not in anyone's best interest to force a child to dance before he or she is ready. Doing so leads to unnecessary frustration and tension for your child. Forcing children's participation risks damaging their sense of self-esteem, damaging their acceptance of dance and other similar activities at a later time, and negatively affecting the class environment for the other children who are ready. If children are not ready, even the best teacher in the world cannot make them so.

Signals that your child may not be ready:

- Your child is frightened to leave you to join the class.
- Your child is overly afraid of new situations and tasks.
- Your child is overly uncomfortable working with a group of children.
- Your child consistently does "his or her own thing" rather than flowing with the teacher and the group.
- Your child consistently has temper-tantrums if he or she doesn't have it his or her way.
- Your child does not have the physical stamina or mental focus to complete a half-hour class.
- Your child tells you he or she doesn't want to return.

When enrolling in dance classes, look for a care-free, fun environment.

How do I prepare my child?

- Include dance in your family life.
- Play music and dance with your child at home.
- Participate in community family dances.
- Let your child see that you enjoy dance.
- Stress that sometimes we are leaders, sometimes we are followers, and sometimes we have to take turns.
- If your child does not have the physical stamina or mental focus, then wait a few months and try again!
- Find studios/teachers that offer new classes throughout the year.
- Find another wonderful activity if dance is not your child's cup of tea.

When enrolling in dance classes, look for a care-free, fun environment. Reputable studios will allow you to observe their ongoing classes. Check out the class subject matter. Children under 6 years old do not need to be placed in a career-building, technique-progressive environment. Let young children first explore all their options before narrowing them. A class titled "Pre-Ballet" might be a fun, creative-based class; it might also be an overly restrictive, overly serious training class for the higher levels of the discipline. A good studio will recognize if a child is not yet developmentally ready for class and offer suggestions while refunding your tuition. Look for a studio where all types of kids (boys and girls) are welcome. Watch out for studios with big, flashy, sequined recitals (smaller children will spend months and months memorizing that one adorable recital dance, but what else?). Look for an experienced teacher who can guide, control, and enchant children in dance. You know you've found the right place at the right time when your child says, "I can't wait to come back!"

"I can't wait to come back!"

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To enhance your child's listening and dancing at home or at nursery school:

Play peppy, fun music and dance with your child. Suggest themes such as:

- How high can you dance?
- How wiggly can you dance?
- How small can you dance?
- How does a dolphin dance?
- A spider?
- An elephant?
- How do you dance when you're happy?
- Sad?
- Silly?
- Mad?
- Can you draw pictures with your dancing body?
- Can you make sculptures?
- Can you tell a story without speaking with your dancing body?

The possibilities are endless! At home and at school you and your child can discover your dancing imaginations!

For a fun-loving musical feast listen to:

- The Best of Bobby McFerrin
- Don Byron's "Bug Music"
- Deep Forest
- The Penquin Cafe Orchestra
- Altan
- The Chieftains
- Open House
- Wild Asparagus

Here's some great song CD's that guide children through dance activities:

- The Chenille Sisters
- Gemini
- The Song Sisters
- Joanie Bartel's "Dancin' Magic"
- Sharon, Lois & Bram's "Let's Dance"
- Steve Rashid's "Fidgety Feet"

Lead Poisoning: The Silent Threat

Lead poisoning is one of the most important medical issues of this decade, especially for those of us raising or working with young children. Yet, it is surprising that many people know very little about the subject until their child is diagnosed with a high lead level. Exactly what is lead poisoning? Why is it so dangerous for young children? What are the symptoms and how do doctors test for it? What is the treatment? By learning the answers to these questions you can give yourself the most powerful tool against this childhood disease–knowledge.

About the Author

Debra Harvey recently fulfilled the requirements for a Master's in Education specializing in Parent and Pre-School Education at Wayne State University. Debra works for the Detroit Public School system for their Head Start program. One of the Head Start program's driving philosophy's since its inception has been both parent involvement in the classroom and parent participation in parent groups outside the classroom.

By Debra Harvey, M.Ed.

What is lead poisoning?
Lead poisoning is a disease caused by dangerously high levels of lead in a child's blood. A variety of household items may contain lead. The most obvious source of lead is lead paint. At one time the lead content of paint was as high as 50%. However, since 1977, household paints have contained less than one percent lead. Buildings and homes built prior to 1978 present a significant threat. Peeling or chipping lead-based paint is a serious hazard to children. Old toys and furniture may also present a lead paint hazard, as well as metal match box cars labeled "Made in Hong Kong." Other sources of lead may be lead pipes and water fixtures, ceramic sinks and bathtubs, dust from household renovations, foreign cosmetics and home remedies (azarcon, greta, kohl, surma), lead-glazed pottery, colored newspaper, food stored in open cans, soft metal objects such as keys or fish sinkers, and tobacco, matches and cigarette ashes. Soil contamination may exist if chips of exterior lead-based paint, lead-based insecticides, or pollution from factories or car exhaust from cars using leaded gas

(remember, it could have been contaminated before the use of unleaded gas) have infiltrated the dirt.

Why is lead poisoning so dangerous for young children?

Young children's bodies absorb lead more easily than adult bodies. In addition, young children are at higher risk because they put everything in their mouths. One of the easiest ways for lead to enter the body is through the mouth. Lead poisoning is so dangerous because lead affects the development of children's growing bodies.

Even low levels of lead can be dangerous to your child. It can slow development, damage the production of red blood cells, and cause hyperactivity, short attention span and quick frustration. Higher levels can cause damage to the nervous system, kidneys and reproductive system, as well as mental impairment. Extremely high levels of lead poisoning can cause coma and even death.

Lead poisoning is so dangerous because lead affects the development of children's growing bodies.

The local Health Department can help to locate the source of the lead as well as treat your child.

What are the symptoms of lead poisoning? Symptoms may include:

- Delayed development in speech, growth and learning
- Stomach problems such as loss of appetite, stomachaches, vomiting or constipation
- General weakness including excessive fatigue and sleep disorders
- Headaches
- Irritability
- Poor coordination.

Unfortunately, a child with lead poisoning may not show any symptoms. Therefore it is important to test young children (9 months to 6 years) about once per year.

How do doctors test for lead poisoning? A simple blood test can assess an individual's lead exposure. The results are reflected in ranges of numbers. Levels of 1-9 are not considered dangerous. A level of 10 or more indicates some exposure to lead. Levels between 15-19 are high, but not considered poisonous. Children exhibiting high lead levels in their blood will need to be tested every 3-4 months while steps are taken to lower the lead level. Levels between 20-44 are poisonous. Your child needs a full medical check-up for lead as well as a lead-free home. The local Health Department can help to locate the source of the lead as well as treat your child. Levels of 45 and above are very serious (over 70 is a medical emergency). In these cases children may need to be hospitalized for treatment. All lead hazards must be removed from your home immediately.

What is the treatment for lead poisoning? Treatment usually involves two steps. The first is to provide a healthy diet high in iron, protein and calcium. Empty stomachs absorb more lead. Therefore three meals a day, plus several healthy snacks are necessary. Good food choices include fresh fruits and vegetables, cheese, milk or yogurt and lean meats, chicken and fish. Avoid all sweets, chips and other fatty or fried foods. Multivitamins will usually be prescribed by a doctor.

The second step in the treatment of lead poisoning involves removing all lead hazards in your home. Regular cleaning is a must. Paint chips and dust should be removed from window sills and floors with a wet sponge daily (cleaners made specifically for lead are available). Grass should be planted to cover soil contaminated with lead. In order to permanently remove lead hazards, a certified "lead abatement contractor" should be contacted. Improper removal of lead-based paint from your home can actually increase the risk to your family.

In addition, it is important to wash your child's hands, toys and pacifiers often. Teach your child not to eat non-food items (such as paint chips or dirt) and cut your child's fingernails often.

Lead poisoning affects one out of 11 children in the United States. It is a silent, and sometimes unseen threat to a child's world of unlimited dreams and potential, yet it is preventable.

Knowledge is the key. Take every step possible to protect your child from this decade's most notorious disease.

Editors' Note: The federal government has allotted $900 million to the state of Michigan to help assess the dangers and adequately and safely alleviate the threat of lead. The first step in the process to create a lead abatement program in Michigan was passed by the Senate. Upon House approval and with the Governor's support, the federal money will soon be available to assist in the elimination of this hazard. For more information, contact State Senator Alma Wheeler Smith (D-18th District):
800-344-alma or
SenASmith@senate.state.mi.us.

For more information:

1. National Lead Hot line: 1-(800)-LEADFYI
2. Detroit Lead Poisoning Prevention and Control: (313) 876-4200
3. To contact lead abatement contractors in Michigan call the Lead Hazard Remediation Program: (517) 335-9390
4. Childhood Lead Prevention Project: (517) 335-8885

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website address: http://www.epa.gov/docs/lead-pm/leadtexte.txt.html

One Step Ahead

Building Firm Foundations: Financing Your Child's Future

Editors' Note: This is the second article in a series designed to keep parents and educators *One Step Ahead* regarding early childhood education, research, and purposeful parenting.

About the Author

Mary Margaret Crombez is a co-op parent of three and recently joined the Offspring *editorial staff. She holds a BS in Special Education and Early Childhood Education, a Master's degree in Parent and Preschool Education and a Post Graduate Certificate in Infant Mental Health. As an at-home mom, Mary appreciates work activities that allow her to remain consistently available to her family while supporting her own professional development. She attributes this opportunity in her life to her husbands's commitment as a partner in parenting.*

By Mary Margaret Crombez, M.Ed.

What does $500 per year amount to over 18 years?

Wouldn't it be great to be "one step ahead" when it comes time for your little one to step into the world of higher education? College tuition rates rise annually; so do the cost of books and housing. But, now you can get a jump on college financing and ensure that you keep one step ahead of the rising cost of education.

The Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 created Education Individual Retirement Accounts (EIRA). Consult your tax or financial advisor to determine if an EIRA may be helpful to your family. EIRA's allow families to make a tax-free contribution of up to $500 per child on an annual basis. To simplify your life you may want to make a deposit on the same day each year such as your child's birthday or some other special day of the year.

What does $500 per year amount to over 18 years? Statisticians have determined that $500/yr at an 8% annual return amounts to over $22,000 in 18 years. Now that's a step in the right direction! The education account can be drawn on until your child reaches age 30 (at this point all funds must be withdrawn to avoid tax penalties).

What College Will Cost (based on a 5% inflation rate)		
Years Away	**Public**	**Private**
Today	10,000	20,000
2 years	11,025	22, 050
4	12,155	24,310
6	13,401	26,802
8	14,775	29,549
10	16,289	32,578
12	17,959	35,917
14	19,799	39,599
16	21,829	43,132
18	24,066	48,132
20	26,533	53,066

Source: USA Today

The eligibility requirements for families include 1) a single annual income of not more than $95,000 or 2) a dual annual income not to exceed $150,000. Families with higher incomes may qualify by contributing the maximum to their 401(k) savings plans.

The Taxpayer Relief Act which offers this plan also produced the Hope tax credit. The Hope tax credit offers parents a tax credit of 100% on the first $1000 spent and 50% on the second $1000 spent during the first two years of college. This tax credit amounts to a $1500 savings. For the third and fourth years of college, the Hope tax credit drops to 20% of the first $5000 spent (this credit also applies to graduate school and continuing education).

Of course, there are restrictions. The Hope tax credit and the EIRA funds cannot be used simultaneously. For many families, the Hope tax credit provides the most financial assistance during the first two years. From then on, the EIRA may be most useful. Again, consult your financial planner or CPA for assistance with regard to your personal finances.

For more information, request a summary of the reports regarding the Taxpayer Relief Act from your state representative by calling (202) 224-3121.

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